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THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF  
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20341

JCSM-113-66

19 February 1966

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

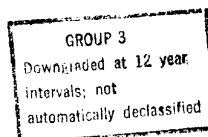
Subject: Air Operations Against North Vietnam (U)

1. (TS) On 12 February 1966, in discussing air operations against North Vietnam (NVN) with the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, you requested a review of ROLLING THUNDER operations, based on a level of 200 sorties per day against the authorized area which existed on 24 December 1965. You indicated that you believed flexibility could be improved by authorizing CINCPAC to schedule, within a level of 6,000 combat sorties per month, daily programs in consonance with the availability of aircraft and other operational factors. This memorandum provides the views and recommendations of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the above.

2. (TS) CINCPAC was queried as to your proposal. He advises that the proposed 7,400 combat sortie program per month for NVN (as briefed in Hawaii in connection with ROLLING THUNDER operations) was not considered an optimum figure; rather, it represented an allocation to the NVN effort for calendar year 1966 within the total forces and ordnance estimated to be available for application to Southeast Asia during this time frame. The 7,400 sorties is an increase over the 7,100 sorties indicated in the general briefing on air matters given in Hawaii. The increase stems from a CINCPAC reassessment of combat support required against the improved air defenses. Recent intelligence on the increase of SAM sites and the probable introduction of a CHICOM antiaircraft artillery organization in the northeast supports the increases made by CINCPAC. CINCPAC stresses that, as the weather over NVN improves, an offsetting deterioration in the weather over Laos can be expected. He recommends that we should utilize our forces available for out-of-country operations in either area as the weather dictates in order to obtain an

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increase in over-all effectiveness. While CINCPAC stated that he prefers not to have a numerical restriction, he recommends a total of ten to eleven thousand sorties per month against NVN and Laos without a ceiling on sorties for each country.

3. (TS) If operations into the northeast quadrant of NVN are not approved at the present time, there are two courses of action considered herein with respect to the application of available combat sorties throughout the remainder of NVN. The first would be to extend our operations throughout the area authorized for armed reconnaissance just prior to the 24 December 1965 stand-down. The second would be to redefine the northeast quadrant with a view toward reducing the excluded areas and authorizing operations within this expanded area.

4. (TS) A level of 6,000 combat sorties per month can be employed in the area which was authorized for armed reconnaissance prior to 24 December 1965. However, in this area of NVN, practically all of the JCS fixed targets have been struck, and the resultant effect of the 6,000 sortie program on NVN would be primarily related to limited interdiction of the LOCs. The impact of such a program on the will of the Hanoi regime to continue directing and supporting the insurgency has not been and probably will not be significant.

5. (TS) If the northeast area must be avoided, a preferable program utilizing all available combat sorties would be to apply them to an expanded area avoiding a redefined northeast quadrant. This area would encompass all NVN less the area north and east of a line extending from the coast, passing four miles south of Haiphong, ten miles south and west of Hanoi/Phuc Yen Airfield, and north to a twenty-nautical-mile buffer zone along the northwest China border. Approximately 650 miles of major rail, highway, and water LOCs, 5,000 square miles of territory, and 18 JCS targets are uncovered for air operations by expanding the area in this manner. A graphic presentation of this expanded area, and the locations of the uncovered JCS targets, is contained in the Appendix.

6. (TS) For both programs which avoid the northeast quadrant, the application of air power is severely limited by the denial of attack against the influx of support to NVN from external sources. This denial of support from the outside is essential to the accomplishment of our military objectives in NVN. As the more remunerative targets and lucrative interdiction areas are denied, greater effort must be made in other areas to compensate partially for this self-imposed operational limitation.

7. (TS) An air strike program designed to permit the attainment of our military objectives in NVN as an essential element in our balanced strategy in Southeast Asia was recommended in JCSM-41-66, dated 18 January 1966. This program would expand the authorized area for offensive air operations to include all of NVN less certain defined areas; remove numerical sortie limitations on armed reconnaissance; remove tactical restrictions or limitations in the execution of the specific air strikes; and authorize CINCPAC to conduct the air campaign against NVN, subject to conceptual approval by the Secretary of Defense. This program includes the early destruction of the NVN POL system and other high-priority targets in the northeast area.

8. (TS) In response to your request and the last sentence of your 15 February 1966 memorandum on this subject, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend that the air strike program as contained in JCSM-41-66 be approved for immediate implementation. It is the soundest program from a military standpoint and offers the greatest return for air effort expended against NVN. This air strike program is also considered to be the minimum essential effort against NVN required to further our military objectives in Southeast Asia.

9. (TS) If other than military considerations dictate that the northeast area of NVN be excluded from attack by our forces, the excluded area should be redefined as in paragraph 5, above, and portrayed in the Appendix. In this case, CINCPAC should be authorized 7,400 combat sorties monthly in NVN and 3,000 combat sorties monthly in Laos, with flexibility for employing his resources as weather and operational factors dictate in order to increase over-all effectiveness.

10. (TS) If the excluded area cannot be redefined as indicated above, the present area of operations should be expanded to that existing on 24 December 1965. In this case, CINCPAC should be granted the flexibility to employ resources allocated to Laos and NVN as weather and operational factors dictate. If for nonmilitary reasons an operational limitation must be established through sortie allocation, such allocation should be on a monthly rather than a daily basis in order to enhance CINCPAC's flexibility.

For the Joint Chiefs of Staff:

SIGNED

EARLE G. WHEELER  
Chairman  
Joint Chiefs of Staff

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Attachment

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